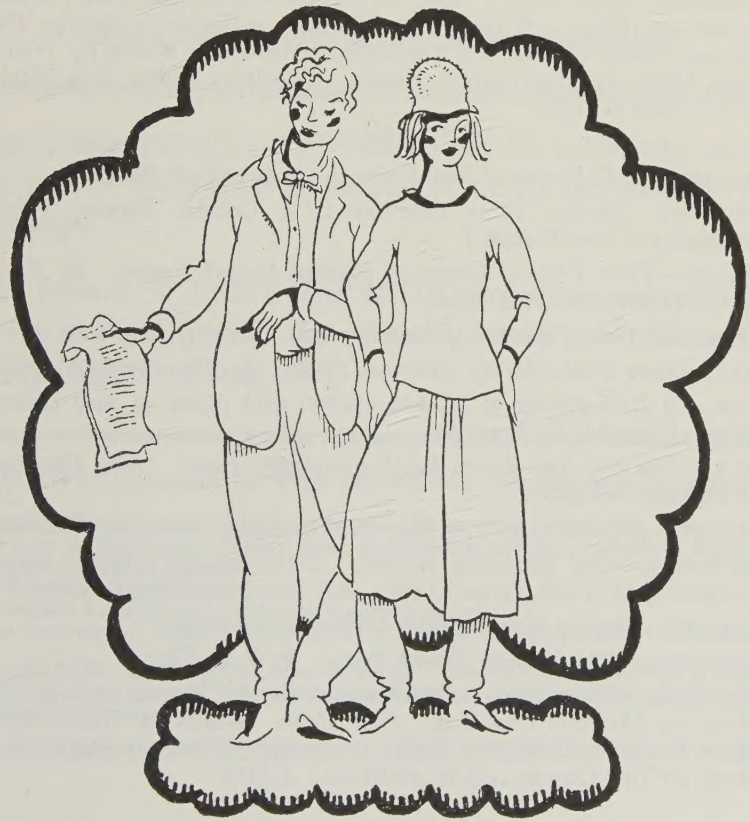
THE CHAPBOOK

(A MONTHLY MISCELLANY)

Number 34 February 1923



ONE SHILLING NET

THE CHAPBOOK (A Monthly Miscellany) first appeared in July, 1919. It is published on the first of each month. The following is a list of the numbers that have already appeared :

1919.

(1) JULY.—*Twenty-three New Poems by Contemporary Poets.*

(2) AUGUST.—*Decoration in the Theatre.* By Albert Rutherston. With four plates by the author.

(3) SEPTEMBER.—*Poems Newly Decorated :* An Anthology of miscellaneous poems of the past, with drawings by artists of the present.

(4) OCTOBER.—*Some French Poets of To-Day.* A commentary with specimens, by F. S. Flint.

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1920.

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(14) AUGUST.—*Aria da Capo* : A Play in One Act by Edna St. Vincent Millay.

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(17) NOVEMBER.—*The Younger French Poets.* By F. S. Flint.

(18) DECEMBER.—*Three Songs : A Christmas Carol.* Words by John Masefield, Music by Malcolm Davidson. *Full Moon.* Words by Walter de la Mare, Music by Scott Goddard. *Desire in Spring.* Words by Francis Ledwidge, Music bv Ivor Gurney.

THE CHAPBOOK
(A MONTHLY MISCELLANY)

EDITED BY HAROLD MONRO

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(*Lascelles Abercrombie*)

Ham and Eggs

A SKY like a dirty canvas tilt
Close on the earth hangs weighing down,
Where water heavy with inland silt
And filth of many a factory town,
Brown river mingling with drab sea,
Laps on the grey sand lazily :
The tide far out on the flat shore,
Slack sea and current come to terms.
A pier of a quarter mile or more,
On stilted footing splayed out wide—
Like a giant kind of those hated worms
With a fringe of legs on either side—
Steps wading through the soft mud-banks
On a hundred iron spindle-shanks
To the fairway where the ferries ply.
The listed boats, nigh toppling
With the press at the gangways, begin to bring
The Saturday-afternoon parade,
With a few free hours and wages paid,
Jostling ashore on its way to buy
Some hasty pleasure. It throngs the pier
And mobs the turnstiles, crammed as tight
As bolting fish shoaled in a weir ;
Then out through the clicking brasswork jets,
Twitching its rumpled jackets aright,
And a dozen ways the current sets,
Everyone for his fancy bound :
Dancing, switchback, giddy-go-round.
Or to buy good luck at the gypsies' tent,
Or to muse, with a lordly blank content,
Upon three mangy slouching bears
In the dank bucket of their pound,
Padding the round they've padded for years.

But most of the holiday troops decide
For the coastwise pathway. On one side
They have, as they take their sauntering ways,
An endless reach of shallow tide ;
And sunlight filtering through fawn haze
Draws streaks and knots of glistering pale
Slippery lustre of mother-of-pearl
On the paved expanse of airless sea :
Like the vagaries of loop and curl,
The faint bright varnish aimlessly
Trackt on a flagg'd walk by a snail.
But on the left side the path goes
Past tumble-down and shabby rows
Of sheds and booths and old marquees,
For dealing in stale gaieties :
Where a giggling crowd for a penny stares
At an oily nigger saying his prayers ;
Or in the clanging shooting-stalls
They fire skew rifles at little balls
Jumping about on water jets ;
Or cheer their glee when a girl upsets
Head-over-heels at end of her ride
Down the slope of the taut wire, slung
For the trolley to race its headlong glide,
She like a sack on her pull'd arms hung.

But eating-shops are commonest ;
And whether there be a special zest
In ham and eggs, their only fare,
Or some more potent trade thrive there,
These flourish more than all the rest.
Frowsy within, dingy without ;
But mouldy finery litter'd about
On mantel-piece and table-top—
Knacks on fancy mats, and a crop
Of tufted grass dyed yellow and pink,

Busts of the King, and glass hand-bells—
With plush-framed panels of glued sea-shells
Pinn'd to the walls, seem meant to make
The munching customer rather think
He eats in a parlour than a shop.
At every door a girl, to take
Her daily gossip, lolls at ease,
Painted to make a parson blink,
And scented to make a foxhound sneeze.
Soon, when the loitering crowds begin,
With female clamour the air will shake,
Harsh as the sound of beaten tin,
Announcing tea and plates of fry ;
Lest heedless hunger ramble by
And lust for ham should not awake.
Let a young man one instant give
Notice to these fierce syllables,
A wench will have him by the sleeve,
Whisper seriously in his ear,
And deftly show her petticoat frills.

But there is no trade yet come near.
The girls, posted to draw it in,
Idle awhile, and akimbo lean
Against the jambs of the doors, and throw
Cheerful scandalous banter about
In a reedy metallic effortless shout ;
Or vacantly watch the steamships go,
That forth into empty oceans glide
Like gods on placid grand affairs,
Enchanted in far-seeing stares,
No more aware they coast beside
Small gazes at the water's edge
Than any thoughtful traveller cares
For ants and beetles in the hedge.

The girl, though, of the meanest shanty there,
Was late to lounge on duty, and the shop
Open'd without her its crazy blister'd door
Wide and inviting to the table laid.
Already news of frying ham crept out
Hissing and savoury rank, and a slut bustled
In and out of the lean-to den at back
That served as kitchen. Even the music now
Struck up a jaunty racket : this was a neat
Black-drest black-bonneted meagre upright old lady,
With grey shawl tight across her shoulders scrimpt,
Sitting, straight as a rod and iron-stiff,
Her back towards the door (" 'Tisn't your face
I'm hiring," she'd been told ; " turn on the tunes
And keep your face turned off : mind that.") She held
The rigid corner of her skinny knees
As fixt as limbs fetter'd together ; and straight
As her spine was, her head was always leant
A little sideways and one shoulder shrugged
Immovably up to it ; even her elbows prest
Firm on her waist as they'd been lasht there close ;
But nimble were her wrists and spry her fingers,
Never a moment flagging in their chase
Of imbecile gaiety. To and fro her hands
Went jangling wolfish chords and tinkling out
Silly flourishing airs ; while she herself,
Fast in her stiff black trance, her tilted head
Held up in an unchanging muse to stare
Six inches over the piano-top at nothing,
Took from her wiry busily trifling hands
Not so much as a shiver.

A door bounced
Clattering open beside her at the back ;
It gave upon a flight of upward stairs.
The wench came flurrying in and slammed it to :

A plump pert rattling merry-hearted thing,
Bright with her own good fortune ; and that was,
To be alive. She skipt across and laid
Firm hold on the old lady's bony shoulders
And shook her stubborn pose ; but the gay hands
Went playing on. So the wench screwed her round ;
Those faithfully frivolous hands were only stopt
When the lean body they were jointed to,
But hardly seemed belonging to, was slued
Right from the key-board ; then they lay in her lap
And twitched uneasy fingers, as a dog
That lately hunted sleeps with jerking paws.

The Wench: The bone of you !—Remind me, the next time
I tickle in the small of my back, to take
Your shoulder-blade for a scratching-post.—Come round,
Bombasine !—I'd to hurry ; I was kept.
Look me over and tell me, is my face
Done all to rights ?—What's to do, Missis Eyes ?
Whatever's the scare about ? It's only paint.

The Old Lady: You ought to be ashamed.

The Wench: The same to you.

The Old Lady: A painted face disgusts me.

The Wench: That's because
You couldn't paint your dry old prune of a face,
Not if you were a house-painter.—Have sense,
And don't be a cross-patch : tell me how I look.

The Old Lady: How should you look ? You look like what you are.

The Wench: You don't : you look respectable.

The Old Lady: You know
I've got to be here.

The Wench: And you know I want to.
We can cry quits.

The Old Lady: Oh, but my dear, my dear,
If I could help myself, I would help you.

The Wench: It would be somebody else if it wasn't me :
I said, have sense.

The Old Lady: Will you never have sense
How this painting your face and dressing up
Makes your life, that should be your very own,
Common as open ground ?—When workmen cut
A short way to their job over a field,
It's very soon the grass is trodden dirt.

The Wench: You skeleton ! Calling me dirt ! And who
Keeps the procession brisk with rousing tunes ?

The Old Lady: No need for that taunt : hot and bitter to me
As scalding poison to be doing this.

The Wench: O look ! Tribes already !—While we're in talk
Good money's slipping past us, running to waste.
Round you go and vamp us a spanking piece.

A slap and a twisting push left the old lady
Instantly stiffen'd into her posture again,
Her thin back turned severe against the door,
With canted head and slightly lifted gaze,
And arms tuckt in ; her diligent weaving hands
Might never have paused : back in their dainty pace
Off tript her fingers impudently jingling

Tinsel music to brighten the seduction
The wench was hoarsely busy with outside,
Snatching at likely passengers and shrugged
Laughingly off a dozen times before
She found her game. A young man, cap awry
To show his grease-lickt forelock, let her grasp
Stay a few seconds on his arm, and felt
Somehow a vague and pleased importance from it.

She knows him hers before he is sure
Himself what his mind is ; and towards the door
She has him dragged, and is whispering,
Hugging him down, some cockering thing.
The delicate bloom of her bared arm greeting
His skin with its fine warm youth, her scent,
Her side against him, her merriment,
Set his heart dizzily beating
Burning blood through every vein ;
And, startling along his nerves, delight
Flashes trembling into his brain.
Flesh clothes his spirit in flame star-white
One lightning moment—flame of the fire
That carries splendour of worlds like flakes
Of darkening slag ; and swift as it came
The brightness dulls—a moment slakes
Flesh that wrapt him in thrilling flame
To flesh that is earth and mere desire.
Now it is easy work, and she
May bend as she likes his waxen will ;
He yields, but he goes sulkily,
And makes her seem to hale him still.

The Wench: Come along, innocent.

The Youth: I'm not innocent.

The Wench: You won't be so stand-offish after tea.

The Youth: I don't want any tea.

The Wench: You'll want plenty
Once you have bitten into our ham.

The Youth: I don't
Fancy your fry.

The Wench: Are you in dread of thirst ?

The Youth: Ay, in a teashop.

The Wench: You wait till you sniff
The tea I'll brew you, and see if you don't wish
You'd shipwreckt in the tropics and brought home
The thirst of it undamaged. And the thing is,
What's cooking in the kitchen now is just
The image of that thirst, the spitting image.

The Youth: Tea's not my style.

The Wench: O, I can size you up.—
How's that ?

The Youth: Whatever have you put in it ?

The Wench: Look in the milk-jug.

The Youth: Whisky !

The Wench: You didn't think
To meet your old friend here !—Now for the fry :
Chew it up well and get the good of it !

The Youth: By God! The good, you call it! Brim me my cup,
Sharp, with the whisky, for a cool long drink.

The brine in deep-sea shrimps were sweet
To the smart pickle of that meat ;
The thirst of labour in blazing sun
Were cool and smooth to the rage begun
With the first bite, in gullet and mouth ;
And soon a tingling parching drouth
Flayed his throat as though it had been
Dried with quicklime, raspt by shagreen.
And cup after cup laced generously
Liquor'd his nettled palate, till he
Grew easy-minded and talkative,
And often sprawled aside to give
The wench a fondling slack caress,
Twixt mouthfuls of his salty mess.

And still that gaunt demure old lady, set
In visionary rigour, kept her mind
Averted, and her awkward figure still
As ebony carving, while her active hands
Danced lightly over the notes in trivial airs.

The Youth: Does she go by steam ?

The Wench: She's a curio.
But she can play.

The Youth: Pretty well, pretty well.
Who put the poker down her back ?

The Wench: She's daft.
She's hazed herself with hours of sitting still
And strumming in black clothes. If I slid out
And left the lights full on she'd play till morning.—
And where do you work ?

The Youth: I'm in a builder's yard.
I'm in the joinery-sheds, where saws and planes
And moulders and the rest spin the whole day,
Chattering and growling and squalling.

The Wench: Are they machines ?
I thought such things were tools you carry about.

The Youth: We're all machinery in the sheds. The roof
Is full of rumbling axles, and you walk
Dodging the flapping criss-cross of the belts
That bring the power slanting to the benches.
I run a morticing machine myself.

The Wench: Are any Jews in your shop ?

The Youth: Ay, there's one.
I'm down on Jews ; I owe them something bitter.
This one cuts wood-blocks at a circular saw ;
A dirty Jew ! Dirt ? There is just one spot
That he keeps clean. Where do you think it is ?

The Wench: I shouldn't like to say.

The Youth: The end of his nose.
And not because he means it : but it dips
Into his tea at every drink he takes,
And washes itself pale as the white of his eyes
In his brown visnomy, just the fat tip.
I paid him out, though.

The Wench: How ?

The Youth: To make his blocks
He pushes the wrought scantling to a stop
And guides it past the humming saw ; and slice
It goes like cutting cheese, and a howling yelp
At every slice like thrashing a puppy-dog.

The Wench: Who is it yelps ? The Jew ?

The Youth: He did yelp once ;
For I was strolling by, and right in the nick
Nudged the beast's elbow, and his hand just grazed
The screaming teeth. O, Mister Jew screamed then;
It sheared his thumb off, clean as you could wish.

The Wench: There's a smart daring lad. And was there trouble ?

The Youth: The whole shop swore him down, gaffer and all ;
Swore black was white, that I was at my bench.

The Wench: Well, shall we go upstairs ?

The Youth: Here's to free love !

For tipsy enough she reckoned him by this
To let her sneaking hands unheeded go
Ransacking through his pockets while he bent
In earnest all his mind on fuddled lust.
She steadied him across the floor and steered
His lurches to the stairs, cuddling so close
That her embrace, before they were half-way,
Learnt the likely pockets for her to rummage.
They had a giggling scuffle to get through
The doorway ; and for all she clipt him firm
And braced herself to hold him, he reeled off
So wide, he nearly stagger'd in her chair
That wistfully unalterable old lady
Keeping her tunes cheerily jigging along
Like clockwork ; but no flicker changed her gaze
Yonderly upward at the wallpaper,
No muscle for the scrimmage at her side
Slackened a moment in her angular
Steadfast unconcern. And still she sat

In the same empty unmoving speculation,
And still her fingers went the same glib gait,
Pouncing delicately, after the wench
Had hauled her sot upstairs.

A little girl
Ran frighten'd from outside into the shop,
Calling as she ran, " Miss Cissy ! Miss Cissy ! "
Her breath, from racing there, caught in her throat,
And her voice hardly shrilled above the old lady's
Never-ending trickle of giddy noise.
But the wench heard and hurried down ; the youth
Came lungeing after her, tripping himself
At every step, and loutishly stood by.
And still the serene old lady prettily played.

The Wench: Didn't I tell you never to come again ?

The Child: But it's your mother, miss !

The Wench: Now you trot back :
Tell her from me I'll not be harried here.
I've had enough of her to-day.

The Child: But, miss,
She's dead.

The Wench: What ?—Stop that tinkling shindy, do !

She leant across, and struck those flippant hands
Down from the keys. The old lady settled back
Unruffled in her chair, grave and ignoring ;
And blandly waited to begin again.

The Wench: Now what's this story ?

The Child : When my aunty called,
There was your mother lying along the floor
As if she'd sprung out of bed—stiff as a crutch
And flat as a flounder, aunty said she was.

The Wench: Nay, I should think hardly as flat as that.

She studied her own thoughts a moment. Then,
Pleasantly brisking round on the old lady,
She said a thing to pierce that distant mind.

The Wench: I'm finisht here : I shan't come back again.
Nobody now swallowing all I can earn !
I'll pick up easy money on my own.
Keep up your heart and give them lovely tunes.

And she and the child were gone. But looking like
Bewilder'd terror now the old lady gaped
After them, and a gleam of frantic passion
Leapt to her eyes swift as a spark from steel ;
Then quencht. And gently to herself she said,
" So she's the one to escape. She would, of course."

The young man suddenly roused out of his daze :
Where was free love ?—He'd lost his chance somehow !
He shoved himself upright away from the wall
Where he had propt his swimming shoulders, stood
Quavering, and then propt himself again
With arms in front, leaning over a table.
He shouted, " Do you mean to swindle me ?
She'd made me pay her, up there on the stairs.
I'll tell the police ! I'll have the law on you ! "

Then the old lady, clenching her lips, and staring
With wide pale eyes at him, slowly stood up,
Decent and black, and very lean and tall.
She must have clutcht her head, for, if it was
The first time in her life, her bonnet now
Tipt ridiculously awry. She reacht
Her hand out for a pot of scarlet grasses,
And poised it ready to shy. " Get out ! " she said,
Very quietly. But 'twas the look of her
That startled him like drenching icy water :
" God love me ! I've lit among the maniacs ! "
He stumbled out, anxiously eyeing her.

So she sat down again. As if she had been
A puppet carefully lower'd onto the chair,
Her limbs folded themselves precise and stiff
Back into her strict attitude again :
With shoulders huncht a little, leaning head,
And elbows squeezed tight in against a waist
Straight as a plank. Unmoving she sat on,
Lonely and prim, lost in a gaze at nothing.

" Another one will come to take her place ;
And I shall still be here, luring them in."

Her hands strayed to the keyboard, hesitated,
Fumbled softly, and then ran off in trills
And graces of a skipping flighty tune.

May, 1919

Two Stories by Humbert Wolfe

I. ON ENTERTAINING ANGELS UNAWARES

THE pale-faced man with the slightly Jewish cast of countenance was observed for the first time on the night of the 27th June passing through the churchyard, by the Vicar, who, taking him, not unnaturally, for a loafer, ordered him out pretty sharply. He obeyed with remarkable meekness and disappeared rapidly in the direction of the house of Mrs. Bolpus. He was next seen on the following evening—a cold clear night of moon—by the village ninny, or so it was supposed. For poor Geordie came back shouting some nonsense about a lighted man, and laughed happily and quietly all night.

It was, however, her ladyship who met him in broad daylight two days later, and engaged him in conversation. For she had heard of his appearance and feared that he might be a new scandal. She had intended to begin by speaking to him roundly, but something soft and flickering in his eyes stopped her. Instead of reproving him therefore, she said, almost as to an equal :

" We are thinking of forming a branch of the Society of Poor Lost Things in the village, and we wondered whether you would care to join ? " " Strange," he replied in a low but beautifully clear voice, " I was also thinking of forming a society. But perhaps our objects are the same. What is yours ? " " Oh," said the lady, " we aim at sweetening bitter lives."

" In that case," said the stranger earnestly, " I would like to give all I have. It is, I fear," he added with a smile, " only a guinea."

" You are joking, I see," murmured the lady, signing a receipt with a gold pencil. " And now, sir, will you forgive me if I make a personal observation."

" But of course," he replied.

" You are lodging with Mrs. Bolpus. As a stranger you cannot know her reputation. If I might without impertinence suggest it, perhaps it would be wise to find a less questionable landlady."

" And yet," mused the stranger, " she seemed poor and unhappy."

" And so she should," cut in the lady.

" Indeed I should have described her as a Poor Lost Thing."

" I can see," said the benefactress, icily taking the guinea out of her purse, " that you have misunderstood the objects of the society. We assist only the deserving."

" In my society," said the man, sadly pocketing his coins, " we assist first the undeserving."

" So I should imagine," sneered her ladyship ; " and what do you call it ? "

" Oh," said the stranger, gently turning away, " we call it the Society of the Rich Lost Things, for whom the way to the kingdom of heaven is through the eye of a needle."

* * * * * * * *

" I hope," said her ladyship to the Earl, her husband, at dinner, " that you will arrange for Mrs. Bolpus to be evicted at once."

" Evicted ! " said the Earl. " But haven't you heard the news ? She died this morning."

" Died ! " gasped the lady. " Then what was the Jew with the beard doing in her house ? "

" The Jew with the beard ? " asked her husband. " I was there to-day and didn't hear of anyone."

" Are you sure ? " cried the Countess.

" Quite ! " said the Earl. " But wait ! Is it perhaps the tramp that the Vicar saw in the churchyard and poor Geordie Brown's ' lighted man.' I think myself that in both cases it was just imagination."

" Perhaps," replied the lady after a long pause, " but all the same I shall resign my chairmanship of the branch of the Poor Lost Things."

" Now what in the name of God——" began the Earl.

" Hush ! " almost screamed his wife.

II. HALF A LOAF IS BETTER THAN NO BREAD

Once upon a time there lived in a cathedral city, almost in the shadow of the minster, a middle-aged Freethinker who was exceedingly angry with God for not existing. Nor was he conciliated by those who pointed out (reasonably enough) that it was not His

fault. This in the view of the Freethinker merely increased the offence. " He should have thought of all that before," he would say grimly.

In the same town, but actually in the minster itself, yes, and in a hole in the pulpit, lived a mouse who, for her part, did not agree with the Freethinker. She was, I fear, not as independent a thinker as she should have been, and permitted herself to be influenced by the singularly sweet voice of the principal officiating priest. Him she (foolishly) identified with the creator of the ample mansion of her choice, and indeed she let it be understood among her acquaintance that she was peculiarly acceptable in his sight. " For," she said, " every day he comes dressed all in white when the sun strikes through the windows throwing a coloured shadow on his robe, and scatters precious bread for me on a stainless cloth. And in further proof," she would say to scoffers, " there is a second and lesser angel, who salutes him, calling him by his name of ' Our Father in Heaven.' " Several mice who doubted her story came, at her invitation, to scoff and remained to eat the sacred crumbs.

Now it was exactly this matter of the bread which above all other Christian uses most inflamed the Freethinker. When he was not railing at the superstition of those who believed that a celestial body could be concealed in milled and baked ears of corn, he was complaining against the waste of good bread. He would calculate a statistic of the annual diversion of bread to this purpose. " Think of the poor ! " he would snort, but it is not certain that he thought of them himself.

The Freethinker's habit in the spring months of the year was to take an early turn along the quiet and flowery streets. The clean and morning beauty was for him an anodyne, and when he was certain of escaping observation he would on occasion slip through a small postern gate in the cathedral and brood happily upon the base uses to which a structure so noble had been addressed. During one of these intrusions he observed that the cloth was laid on the high altar and that the priest was preparing the Communion service. As no worshippers appeared the Freethinker drew near to the altar in order to satisfy himself by personal witness of the futility of the celebration.

The priest did not observe (or did not appear to observe) his visitor, but completed the ritual as though in the company of a great host. " Buffoonery," muttered the Freethinker, struggling angrily against the radiant charm of the sun falling through old glass. " Bad enough," he continued in an audible whisper, " to serve bread to those who do not need it, but to serve it to nobody at all——!!"

" Are you sure," said the priest, who had finished the service, " that it is for nobody ? " and he pointed smiling to the tiny grey communicants nibbling the crumbs. " Do I understand," inquired the Freethinker icily, " that you perform this service for the sake of the mice ? " " Why not ? " said the priest. " As you do to the least of these——" " That," said the Freethinker, quite properly indignant, " is what I should call blasphemy." " And of that," said the priest, turning to go to the vestry, " you should be no mean judge." The Freethinker did not reply.

* * * * * * * *

" Sir," said the verger to the priest later in the day, " them mice have been about again. I see two of them at the sacred bread. I wish you would let me set traps." " Why," said the priest, " I have already set one." " And did you catch anything ? " asked the verger. " I think so," said the priest.

A QUOTATION FROM PART FIVE OF " THE WASTE LAND " :

What have we given ?
My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed
Which is not to be found in our obituaries
Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
In our empty rooms

Notes for a Study of *The Waste Land*

I.

An Imaginary Dialogue with T. S. Eliot (*Mr. Eliot's answers are in Italics*).

I HAVE just read your poem The Waste Land five or six times. I don't suppose you consider me capable of understanding it ?—*Well ?*—I was much interested in your new periodical The Criterion, in which it appeared, and I also saw it in the American Dial.—*Well ?*—I observed that in England it was treated chiefly with indignation or contempt, but that the Dial awarded you its annual prize of two thousand dollars.—*Well ?*

I suppose it is not very easy for those who have not read your book The Sacred Wood to understand your poetry. Some insight into your mind is advisable.—*Possibly*.—An article appeared in a recent number of the Dial purporting to elucidate your poem. Do you think that Mr. Edmund Wilson, Jr., the writer of that article, was justified in stating that (though it consists of little more than four hundred lines) it " contains allusions to, parodies of, or quotations from " (here he enumerates thirty-three sources) ?—*Possibly*. —I can only recognise a dozen or so. This may be because my reading is not sufficiently wide.—*Possibly*.—*Well ?*

I have heard it suggested that you write for one hypothetical intelligent reader.—*Well ?*—Do you think such a reader at present exists ?—*I'm not sure*.—Do you think perhaps that he is yet to be born ?—*That depends*.

I think you do your public an injustice. Presumably the Editors who awarded you that prize may be gifted with some intelligence ? —*I am not prepared to judge*.—And Mr. Edmund Wilson, Jr., makes the assertion that your " trivialities are more valuable than other peoples' epics." He at any rate has an instinct for appreciation. —*I am not prepared to judge*.—Myself, I am inclined to think that some of your favourable critics, however unwillingly, do as much damage to your repu—*That doesn't matter anyway*.

Did you submit your poem to the London Mercury ?—*No.*—If you had, do you think the L.M. would have accepted it ?—*No.*—But if some friend of yours had submitted it for you, and if it had been accepted, would you have minded ?—*Yes.*—Why ?—*I don't know. It doesn't concern me.*

Let me see : where are we now ? I was saying—*I haven't heard you say anything much yet.*—Very well : I was about to say that The Waste Land seems to me as near to Poetry as our generation is at present capable of reaching. But, thinking about it the other evening, I suddenly remembered a sentence from The Sacred Wood : " the moment an idea has been transferred from its pure state in order that it may become comprehensible to the inferior intelligence it has lost contact with art." And then, another : " It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting." These and other similar passages almost make one feel that one ought not to be appreciative, as if, indeed, it were low and vulgar to enjoy a work of literature for its own sake.—*That depends upon the condition of your mind, and the kind of enjoyment you feel.*—You, no doubt, felt nothing personal in writing The Waste Land ?—*No doubt.*—But, Mr. Eliot, surely your disgust for the society that constitutes the world of to-day may be described as a personal emotion ?—*If you refer to The Sacred Wood again you will find this sentence : " Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry."*

I am completely in agreement with it.

May I direct some criticism upon your poem ? But first I should mention that I know it was not written for me. You never thought of me as among your potential appreciative audience. You thought of nobody, and you were true to yourself. Yet, in a sense, you did think of me. You wanted to irritate me, because I belong to the beastly age in which you are doomed to live. But, in another sense, your poem seems calculated more to annoy Mr. Gosse, or Mr. Squire, than me. I imagine them exclaiming : " The fellow *can* write ; but he *won't.*" That would be because just when you seem to be amusing yourself by composing what they might call *poetry*, at that moment you generally break off with a sneer. And, of course,

they can't realise that your faults are as virtuous as their virtues are wicked, nor that your style is, as it were, a mirror that distorts the perfections they admire, which are in truth only imitations of perfections. Your truest passages seem to them like imitations of imperfections. I am not indulging in personalities, but only using those gentlemen as symbols.—*Well, direct your criticisms anywhere you like. You are becoming slightly amusing, but not yet worth answering. . . .*

2.

Most poems of any significance leave one definite impression on the mind. This poem makes a variety of impressions, many of them so contradictory that a large majority of minds will never be able to reconcile them, or conceive of it as an entity. Those minds will not go beyond wondering why it so often breaks itself up violently, changes its tone and apparently its subject. It will remain for them a *pot-pourri* of descriptions and episodes, and while deprecating the lack of *style*, those people will console themselves with soft laughter. That influential London Editor-critic who dismissed it as " an obscure but amusing poem " is an instance.

Obscure it is, and amusing it can be too ; but neither quite in the way he seems to have meant. They who have only one definition for the word poem may gnash their teeth, or smile. One definition will not be applicable to The Waste Land. Of course, most poets write of *dreaming*, and use the expression that they *dream* in its conventional rhetorical sense, but this poem actually is a dream presented without any poetic boast, bluff or padding ; and it lingers in the mind more like a dream than a poem, which is one of the reasons why it is both obscure and amusing. It is not possible to see it whole except in the manner that one may watch a cloud which, though remaining the same cloud, changes its form repeatedly as one looks. Or to others it may appear like a drawing that is so crowded with apparently unrelated details that the design or meaning (if there be one) cannot be grasped until those details have been absorbed into the mind, and assembled and related to each other.

3.

A friend came to me with the discovery that he and I could not hope to understand Mr. Eliot's poems ; we had not the necessary culture : impossible for us to recognise the allusions. I asked him whether the culture could be grown in a bottle or under a frame, or in the open. Mr. Edmund Wilson, Jr., tells us, on the other hand, that " it is not necessary to know . . . any but the most obvious of Mr. Eliot's allusions to feel the force of the intense emotion which the poem is intended to convey." I was inclined to side with Mr. Wilson, so we confined ourselves to discussing the permissibility of introducing, as Mr. Eliot does, into the body of a poem, wholly or partly, or in a distorted form, quotations from other poems. " In the absence of inverted commas," said my friend, " the ignorant, when they are French quotations (seeing that Mr. Eliot has written several French poems) or German even, might mistake them for lines belonging to the poem itself. It is simple cribbing. The distortions are more serious still. For instance

> When lovely woman stoops to folly and
> Paces about the room again, alone,
> She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
> And puts a record on the gramophone.

is an outrage, and a joke worthier of Punch than of a serious poet. Also I much prefer the Bible, Spenser, Shakespeare, Marvell and Byron to Eliot. Marvell wrote :

> But at my back I always hear
> Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near.

Eliot writes :

> But at my back in a cold blast I hear
> The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.

Well, that is simply a meretricious travesty of one of the most beautiful couplets in English poetry. It is wicked."

I answered : " It is only a natural jeer following upon an exposure of emotion. A schoolboy is hardly as nervous of showing his feelings. The matter cannot be judged in your manner. What we have to find out is whether T. S. Eliot is a sufficiently constructive or imaginative, or ingenious poet to justify this freedom that he exercises."

He answered : " Yes, but . . .

> But at my back I always hear
> Eliot's intellectual sneer.

—Now I'm doing it myself."

4.

This poem is at the same time a representation, a criticism, and the disgusted outcry of a heart turned cynical. It is calm, fierce, and horrible : the poetry of despair itself become desperate. Those poor little people who string their disjointed ejaculations into prosaic semblances of verse—they pale as one reads The Waste Land. They have no relation to it : yet, through it, we realise what they were trying, but have failed, to represent. Our epoch sprawls, a desert, between an unrealised past and an unimaginable future. The Waste Land is one metaphor with a multiplicity of interpretations.

5.

These are the opening lines :

> April is the cruellest month, breeding
> Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
> Memory and desire, stirring
> Dull roots with spring rain.
> Winter kept us warm, covering
> Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
> A little life with dried tubers.

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